Text of Final Report Adopted by Synod of Bishops in Rome: Synod's ...
Special to The New York Times
New York Times (1923-Current file); Dec 8, 1985; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times
pg. 34

Text of Final Report Adopted by Synod of Bishops in Rome

Special to The New York Times

ROME, Dec. 7 — Following is the text of the final report adopted today by the Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops. It was obtained and translated from the Latin by The New York Times.

Final Report, Second Edition

The Church Under the Word of God Celebrating The Mystery of Christ for the Salvation of the World

I. The Central Argument of This Synod: The Celebration, Verification and Promotion Of the Second Vatican Council

1. The Spiritual Experience Of This Synod

As this second extraordinary Synod concludes we must give many thanks first of all for the goodness of God who deigned to inspire the sovereign Pontiff to convoke this Synod. To the same Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, we give thanks for having called us to this celebration, the 20th anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. The Synod was for us an occasion in which we experienced again and again communion in one Spirit, in one faith and hope and in one Catholic Church; also, in the common conciliar desire, in the practice and in the life of leading the Church. We have been made participants in joy and hope, but also in the sorrow and anguish which the Church, dispersed throughout the world, suffers.

2. The Conclusion of the Synod Having Been Obtained

The end for which this Synod had been convoked was a celebration, a verification and a promotion of the Second Vatican Council. With grateful hearts we perceive as God assists us that this outcome, this fruit, has truly been achieved. Unanimously we celebrate the Second Vatican Council as a grace of God and a gift of the Holy Spirit from which many spiritual fruits in the universal churches, in the particular church and also in all people of our day have gone forth. Unanimously and with joy we also verify the Second Vatican Council as a legitimate and solid expression and interpretation of the deposit of faith, as it is contained in scripture and in the lived tradition of the Church. We are determined to proceed further in the way which the Council has indicated to us. There is full consensus among us on the further necessity of promoting an understanding and an application of the Council — both as to its letter and as to its spirit. In this way, there may be a new step in the reception of the Council, that is in its spiritual interiorization and practical application.

3. Light and Darkness in Reception of the Council

For a long time many faithful have taken up with fervent spirits the Second Vatican Council, although a few have hesitated here and there. It is not to be doubted, therefore, that the Council has been received with a great assent of spirit because it to this that the Holy Spirit has drawn His Church. Furthermore, many of those outside of the Catholic Church have high regard for the Second Vatican Council. But however great were the fruits brought by the Council, we recognize at the same time and with great sincerity the defects and difficulties in the reception of the Council. In this post-conciliar time certainly there were dark moments which came partially from a defect in understanding and applying the Council and partly from other causes. In no way, however, can all those things which came after the Council be thought of as coming about because of the Council. Most of all, in this so-called first world, the question ought to be asked: Why after such ample and profound doctrinal explanation about the Church there occurs so frequently a disaffection toward the Church, although in the Church, too, there also abound the fruits of the Council. Where truly the Church is oppressed by whatever totalitarian ideology, or wherever the Church raises up its voice against social injustice, it seems more to be accepted in a positive way. However, it is cannot be denied that amidst many faithful there exists a full and total identification with the Church and its primary mission.

4. External and Internal Causes of Difficulty

In many parts of the world the Church lacks material and personal means by which it may carry out its mission. It is not rare, furthermore, that is impeded in the exercise of its proper liberty by external force. In the rich nations, which glory in their technological capabilities, ideologies lead more and more to an idolatry of material goods, so-called consumerism. From this follows a sort of blindness toward realities and spiritual values. We do not deny the existence of influential and dangerous forces working in society which are somewhat hostile to the Church. All these things demonstrate that the "Prince of this world" and the mystery of injustice are also at work in our times.

Among the internal causes of difficulty are to be noted a partial and selective reading of the Council, and also a superficial interpretation of its doctrine in one or another sense. On the one hand, deceptions were born because we were too timid in applying the true doctrine of the Council. On the other hand, from a partial reading of the Council was brought about a unilateral presentation of the Church as a mere institutional structure, devoid of its mystery. Perhaps we are not entirely freed from all responsibility for the the fact that young people in particular regard the Church critically, as merely institutional. Is it not perhaps true that we have emphasized only a renewing of the external structures of the Church, and have spoken little of God and Christ? Also, there was a spiritual difficulty in heart in not rightly distinguishing between the legitimate openness of the Council toward the world on the one hand, and accepting the mentality and order of values of the secularized word on the other.

5. A More Profound Reception Of the Council

These and other defects demonstrate the need for a more profound reception of the Council, which should occur in four steps: a broader and more profound understanding of the Council; its internal assimilation; a love of its affirmations, and its application in life. Only an internal assimilation and a translation into life will allow the documents of the Council to stand forth as lively and life-giving.

The theological interpretation of the doctrine of the Council ought always to consider all of the documents, in themselves and in their interconnection, so that an integral sense of the judgment of the Council is be possible. Special attention is given to the four greater constitutions of the Council which are keys of interpretation for the other documents and declarations. It is not legitimate, however, to separate the pastoral and the doctrinal import of the documents, just as it is not possible to separate the spirit and the letter of the Council. The Council is to be understood, furthermore, from the doctrines of the Council itself and in continuity with the great tradition of the Church, whose light must be accepted for the people of our time. The Church itself is the same in all councils.

6. Suggestions

In particular churches pastoral planning for coming years is suggested for new, more ample and more profound understanding and reception of the Council. This is to be obtained first of all through a renewed diffusion of the documents themselves, through careful study of that which the documents expound and a better reception of their understanding by the faithful. In the ongoing formation of priests and of those who prepare for the priesthood, in the formation of religious men and women, and also of Christian adults, the conciliar doctrine ought to be offered to them continuously and aptly through conferences and courses. Diocesan synods and other ecclesiastical meetings for the application of the Council are useful. Recourse to the media of social communications (mass media) are opportunely commended. For a correct understanding and application of the doctrine of the Council, it was most useful to read and to put into practice those things which are held in various Apostolic Exhortations, which are almost as a fruit of the ordinary synods which have been held since 1969.

II. Particular Themes of the Synod

Because Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the new Adam, also the mystery of God and the mystery of man and of his high calling stand forth. (cf. Gaudium et Spes XXII). The Son of God was made man so that men might be made Sons of God. Through this familiarity with God, man is led to his high dignity. In this regard, when the Church preaches Christ, it announces salvation to men.

A. About the Mystery of the Church

1. Secularism and Signs Of Return to the Sacred

A brief space of time of 20 years separates us from the end of the Council. Rapid changes have been brought in with it in history. In this sense the signs of our times in some points do not coincide with those things which stood around the circumstances of the Council. Among those it is especially necessary to attend to the phenomenon of secularism. Without a doubt the Council assigned a legitimate autonomy to temporal things (cf. Gaudium et Spes 36 and others). In this sense a secularized intellect ought to be well understood, to be admitted. But secularism which consists in an autonomous vision of man and of the world, which prescinds from the dimension of mystery, which neglects it and which also negates it: This is another thing entirely. This concern with the immediate is a reduction of an integral vision of man, which leads not to his true liberty, but to a new idolatry, to servitude under ideologies, to a life in rigorous structures, and often to oppressive structures of this world.

Notwithstanding secularism, there are signs of a return to the sacred. Today there are signs of a new appreciation and thirst for the transcendental and the divine. We must offer to the people of our time an opening to the dimension of "the divine" or of mystery as a preamble of faith, so that they cooperate in a return to the sacred and so that we will overcome the secularism of our time. For, as the Council said, man is the question for himself; God alone holds forth the final and full response. (cf. Gaudium et Spes 21). Is it not that a diffusion of sects poses to us a question of whether a sense of the sacred is sufficiently carried through?

2. The Mystery of God Through Jesus Christ And the Holy Spirit

The primary mission of the church under the impulse of the Holy Spirit is to preach and to testify the good and happy news of election, of the mercy and charity of God, which is manifested in the history of salvation, and which in the fullness of times through Jesus Christ comes to a culmination; and to offer and communicate this to men as salvation by the power of the Holy Spirit. The light of the nations is Christ! The church must take care to announce the Gospel so that it will shine forth clearly on its face (Lumen Gentium 1). The Church will be made more credible if speaking less of itself, it preaches more and more of Christ crucified (cf. I Corinthians 22). Thus the Church is as a sacrament, that is as a sign, an instrument of communion with God and also of communion and reconciliation of men among themselves. The announcement of the Church as it was described by the Second Vatican Council is trinitarian and Christocentric.

3. The Mystery of the Church

Each moment of the Church is derived from its connection with Christ. The Council described in diverse ways the Church as the people of God, as the body of Christ, as the spouse of Christ, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, as the family of God. These descriptions of the Church mutually complete themselves and under the light of the mystery of Christ or of the Church in Christ are able to be understood. We are not able to substitute a false unilateral vision of a merely hierarchical Church through new and unilateral sociological conceptions of the Church. Jesus Christ is present always to his Church and in it lives as the one who is risen. From the connection of the Church with Christ escatalogical obligations of the Church itself are clearly understood (cf. Lumen Gentium Chapter VII). In this way the Church as a pilgrim on Earth is a messianic people (cf. Lumen Gentium IX) which anticipates in itself a new creation. Although the Church gathers to itself sinners and always needs to be purified, it remains among the toil of this world and the consolations of God holy, moving forth to the future kingdom. (cf. Lumen Gentium VIII). In this sense the mystery of the cross in the Church and the mystery of the Resurrection are always present.

4. The Universal Call To Sanctity

Because the Church is a mystery in Christ, it ought to be considered as a sign and an instrument of sanctity. The Council taught about this vocation of all the faithful to holiness (Lumen Gentium Chapter V). The vocation to sanctity is an invitation to an intimate conversion of heart and to a participation in the life of God, one and triune, which signifies a fuller fulfillment of all the desires of men and which goes beyond. Precisely in this time when many people experience an internal emptiness and a spiritual crisis, the Church ought to preserve and to promote strongly a sense of penance, of prayer, of adoration, of sacrifice, of itself as an oblation, as charity and justice.

In most difficult circumstances through the entire history of the Church holy men and women were the fount and the source of renovation. Today we vehemently encourage holy people to be continually imploring God. Institutes of the consecrated life through a profession of evangelical councils are aware of their special mission in the Church today and we must add to them for a mission of souls. Apostolic movements and new "spiritual movements," if they remain correctly in ecclesiastical communion, hope for great hope. All lay people ought to implement their role in the Church and in the activities of daily life, be they in the family, in work, in secular activities and relaxation so that thus the life and the light of Christ may penetrate and transform the world. Popular devotion rightly understood and correctly led into practice is extremely useful as a nourishment for the sanctity of the people. About this greater attention ought to be given by the pastors.

For all Christians the Blessed Virgin Mary who stands forth as mother of us in the order of grace (cf. Lumen Gentium 61) is an example of sanctity and of a total response to the vocation of God (cf. Lumen Gentium Chapter VIII).

5. Suggestions

Today it is furthermore necessary that pastors of the Church excel in a testimony of holiness. Already in seminaries and in religious houses of formation it is to be initiated so that the candidates will be led not only to a greater intellectual but also spiritual understanding; therefore it is seriously to be introduced into daily spiritual life (prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, the sacrament of penance and of Eucharist). They are to be prepared according to the mind of the decree "Presbyterorum Ordinis" — thus they are to be prepared for priestly mystery so that in that very exercise of pastoral charity they may find nourishment for their spiritual life (cf. "Presbyterorum Ordinis" XVI). Note also they are apt for faithful in ministries that they are able to show forthright counsels for spiritual life.

A true renovation of the institutes of consecrated life is entirely to be encouraged. But also the spirituality of the laity founded in baptism is to be promoted. First of all the spirituality of spouses is to be promoted, which is begun in the sacrament of marriage and is greatly important in the work of the handing on of the faith for future generations.

B. The Fonts From Which the Church Lives

a. The Word of God

1. Scripture Tradition Magisterium

The Church listening religiously to the word of God is faithfully held to proclaiming it (confer Dei Verbum 1). Therefore among the principal obligations of the Church and especially of the bishops, the preaching of the gospel stands out today as most important (confer Lumen Gentium 25). In this context appears the importance of the dogmatic constitution "Dei Verbum," which had been greatly neglected but was proposed by Pope Paul VI in the Apostolic exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi" (1974) in more profound and contemporary way.

Also, for this constitution it is necessary that a partial reading be avoided. Most importantly the exegesis of the original sense of sacred scripture, which is commended especially by the Council (cf. Dei Verbum 12), cannot be separated from the living tradition of the Church (cf. Dei Verbum 9) nor from the authentic interpretation of the magisterium of the Church (cf. Dei Verbum 10).

That false opposition between the doctrinal and pastoral roles of the Church is to be avoided and overcome. Certainly the true pastoral intention consists in actualizing and concretizing the truth of salvation, which in itself is valid for all times. The bishops as true pastors must show the right way to their flock they must enforce the faith of their flock and lead them away from all danger.

2. Evangelization

The mystery of the divine life which the Church shares needs to be proclaimed to all peoples. The Church is of its very nature missionary (cf. Ad Gentes 2). Therefore the bishops are not only doctors of the faithful but also announcers of the faith who lead new disciples to Christ (cf. Lumen Gentium 25). Evangelization is the first obligation not only for bishops but also for priests and deacons, even for all the Christian faithful.

Wherever in the world today the transmission of the faith and moral values coming forth from the Gospel is in danger for the next generation (the young), the understanding of the faith and the recognition of the moral order often is reduced to a minimum. A new effort in evangelization and in its systematic and integral catechesis is required.

Evangelization not only pertains to the mission in the ordinary sense, that is to the people. Evangelization of non-believers presupposes a self-evangelization of the baptized, and, in another sense, of those deacons, of priests and of bishops. Evangelization occurs through witnesses; witnesses not only of the word, but also that their lives give witness. We must not forget the Greek understanding of the word "martyrium." Under this aspect, the older churches are able to learn much from the new churches by their very dynamism, life and testimony even unto the shedding of the blood of martyrs.

3. The Relations Between The Magisterium of the Bishops And Theologians

Theology according to the noted description of St. Anselm is "faith seeking understanding." All Christians ought to give a reasoning (an apologia) of the faith, which in itself is hope (cf. the First Letter of Peter 3,15). Theology is necessary especially in the life of the Church today. We joyfully recognize that which has been done through fruitful application by theologians, whether by formulating the documents of the Second Vatican Council or by their interpretation to the faithful. On the other hand we regret theological discussions, which are still going on in our day, that have brought about confusion among the Christian faithful. About this, a greater mutual communication and dialogue is necessary between bishops and theologians for the building up of a more profound understanding of faith.

4. Suggestions

It is highly desired that a common catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine both of faith and of morals ought to be written which will be a point of reference for the catechisms to be compiled in diverse regions of the world. The presentation of doctrine must be such that it is biblical and liturgical, holding forth sound doctrine and accommodated to the daily life of Christians.

The formation of candidates to the priesthood is greatly to be cared for. In that regard there ought to be philosophical formation and theological formation which the decree "Optatam Totius" 16 proposes. There ought to be produced theological manuals of sound doctrine of a scientific method and a pedagogical method but also recognizing the true sense of the Church.

b. The Sacred Liturgy

1. The Internal Renovation Of the Liturgy

The liturgical renovation is the greatest visible fruit of the works of the Council. Although their exist some difficulties generally, they have been accepted happily and with great fruit by the faithful. Liturgical renovation ought not be restricted to ceremonies, rites and texts, but also should include a greater participation not only in external activities, but especially in internal and spiritual participation: All this consists in the living and fruitful participation in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ (cf. Sacrosanctum Concilium XI). Precisely the liturgy must foment a sense of the sacred and make it shine forth. It must be imbued with a sense of reverence, veneration and of glorifying God.

2. Suggestions

Bishops not only ought to correct abuses but also explain the theological foundation of the discipline of the sacraments and the liturgy clearly for the people.

Catechisms as they were in the early days of the Church ought today to introduce that which is in the liturgical life (Mystagogical Catechesis).

Future, priests must learn liturgical life and must come to know well the theology of liturgy.

C. The Church as Communion

1. The Meaning of Communion

The ecclesiology of communion is the central idea and the fundamental idea in the documents of the Council. Koinonia/Communio, are founded in scripture, in the ancient church and in the Eastern church they have been greatly honored until our very day. Much has been done by the Second Vatican Council so that the Church may be understood more clearly as a communion and that this might be more concretely translated in life.

What does the complex word "communio" mean? Fundamentally we speak of communion with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. This communion is had in the word of God and in the sacraments. Baptism is the door and the foundation of the communion of the Church; the Eucharist is the font and the culmination of the entire Christian life (cf. Lumen Gentium XI). The communion of the Eucharistic body of Christ means and brings about or builds up the intimate communion of all faithful into the body of Christ which is the Church (cf. I Corinthians 10:16 ff.).

Therefore the ecclesiology of communion cannot to be reduced merely to questions of organization or questions which merely regard power. However, the ecclesiology of communion is the foundation for order in the Church and especially for a correct relationship in the unity and in the diversity in the Church.

2. Unity and Pluralism In the Church

As we believe in one God and in the one and only mediator Jesus Christ, in the one Spirit, also in one baptism and in one Eucharist, by which the unity and the unicity of the Church is both signified and built up. This especially in our time is extremely important because the Church as one and unique — that is as sacrament — is a sign and instrument of unity, of reconciliation, of peace among peoples, nations, classes and races. The unity of faith and of the sacraments, and especially of the hierarchic community with the center of unity for us existing in the Petrine Office as given by Christ, the Church is that messianic people, about which the constitution "Lumen Gentium" IX speaks; thus ecclesiastical communion with Peter and his successors is not an obstacle but an anticipation and a prophetic sign of a fuller unity.

On the other hand, the one and same Spirit works in many and varied spiritual gifts and charisms (cf. I Corinthians 12:4 ff.), and the one and same Eucharist is celebrated in various locales. In this way the one and universal Church truly exists in all particular churches (cf. Christus Dominus XI), and these are formed unto the image of the universal Church; thus the one and unique Catholic Church subsists in and from particular churches (cf. Lumen Gentium XXIII). This is the true theological principle of truth and of diversity in unity we hold, a diversity which is to be distinguished from mere pluralism. Although there is a great richness of pluralism and it carries with it a fullness which is truly and of itself Catholic, a pluralism which is founded on a position of opposition, for dissolution and destruction, can leads to a loss of identity.

3. Oriental Churches

Under the aspect of communion today the Catholic Church makes much of institutes, liturgical rights, ecclesiastical traditions and the discipline of the Christian life of the Oriental Churches, because they are outstanding according to venerable antiquity and also because in them the tradition from the apostles through the fathers exists (cf. OE 1). In those churches from the most ancient times lives the institution of patriarchs which from the first ecumenical council has been recognized (cf. OE 7). And this occurs even today that in the Oriental Churches by the the death and the blood of their martyrs, they give forth testimony for Christ and for His Church.

4. Collegiality

The ecclesiology of communion offers a sacramental foundation of collegiality. This theology of collegiality is much more extensive than that which is to be considered merely juridic. Collegial affection is greater than collegial effects only juridically understood. Collegial affection is the very soul of collaboration among bishops, be it in regional areas, or in national areas, or in international areas.

Collegial action in a strict sense implies an activity of the total college, together with the head of the whole Church; its most conspicuous expression is in ecumenical council.

Continued on Following Page

Blocked due to copyright. See full page image or microfilm.

Agence France-Presse

Pope John Paul II delivering a speech at the closing session of the Synod of Bishops yesterday at the Vatican.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Synod's Report: Bishops in Support of Vatican II

Continued From Preceding Page

In the whole theological question of the relationship between the primacy and the college of bishops there cannot be made a distinction between the Roman Pontiff and the bishops collectively joined. The disctinction is rather between the Roman Pontiff on the one hand, and the Roman Pontiff with the bishops on the other (cf. Lumen Gentium Nota Explicativa 3), because the college together with its head and never without its head is the subject of the supreme and full power in the universal church (cf. Lumen Gentium 22).

From this first sense of collegiality strictly construed there are distinct and diverse partial realities, which are true signs and instruments of collegial affection: the Synod of Bishops, conferences of bishops, the Roman Curia, and visits ad limina, etc. All of these relations are not able directly to be deduced from principles of theological collegiality; but are ruled by ecclesiastical law. These however and other forms, sueh as the pastoral visits of the supreme Pontiff, are services of importance for the whole College of Bishops together with the Pope and also for individual bishops, whom the Holy Spirit has placed to rule the Church of God (cf. Acts of the Apostles 20:28).

5. Episcopal Conferences

Through episcopal conferences collegial affection is brought to a concrete application (cf. Lumen Gentium 23). There is no one who doubts their pastoral usefulness, indeed even their necessity, in modern times. In episcopal conferences the bishops of one nation or of one territory exercise their pastoral role jointly (cf. Christos Dominos 38; Code of Canon Law Canon 447).

In the way in which episcopal conferences proceed, it is necessary to consider both the good of the Church — that is as a service of unity — and the inalienable responsibility of individual bishops toward the universal church and their own particular church.

6. Participation and Co-responsibility in the Church

Church communion is a participation and ought to be considered as a co-responsibility in all of its grades. This general principle is understood in diverse ways in diverse situations.

Between the bishop and his presbyterate there exists a relation founded in the sacrament of orders. It is such that the priests in the particular congregations of the faithful make the bishop present and take up his role and solicitude in daily care (cf. Lumen Gentium 28). Whence between the bishop and his presbyterate there ought to exist friendly relations and full mutual trust.

Bishops with grateful souls feel themselves obliged toward their priests, who in the post-conciliar times have a great part in bringing the council into practice (cf. Optatum Totius 1). In accord with their abilities, they want to be close to their parishes and do so often by their far from easy work, offering assistance and help.

There ought to be created therefore a spirit of collaboration with deacons and also with the bishop and the religious men and women who are working in a particular church. Whence a new style of collaboration between laity and clergy is created by the Second Vatican Council in the Church. A spirit of availability by which many lay people have offered themselves for service in the Church is to be counted among the best fruits of the Council. In this new experience from which all of us are the Church.

About the vocation and mission of women in the Church in these recent years there has often been a question. The Church ought to care that women be present in the Church such that their own proper gifts are able to be exercised adequately in the service of the Church and that they may have a larger part in the various fields of the aposolate of the church (cf. AA 9). Pastors ought to accept gratefully and encourage the collaboration of women in the work of the Church.

The Council calls young people the hope of the Church (cf. GE 2). This Synod, with a particular love and with great trust, turns itself toward young people and looks forward to their generous dedication and it is also greatly to be encouraged that in assuming their mission in the Church they take up dynamically the inheritance of the Council and they follow it through.

Because the Church is a communion of new so-called "base communities," so truly may they live in the unity of the Church, a true expression of communion and an instrument for building up a more profound communion. For this reason there is great hope for the life of the Church (cf. EN 58).

7. Ecumenical Communion

The Catholic Church existing in an ecclesiastical communion at the time of the Second Vatican Council fully assumed its ecumenical responsibilities. Through these 20 years we are able to affirm that ecumenism is profoundly and indelibly written in the conscience of the Church. We Bishops ardently wish that the already existing but incomplete communion with non-Catholic churches and communities, by the grace of God, may come to full communion.

The ecumenical dialogue must be exercised in diverse stages in the Church, be they in the universal Church, in local churches, or in concrete local groups. Dialogue must be both spiritual and theological; the ecumenical movement is especially encouraged through prayer. Dialogue is authentic and fruitful if it presents truth with love and with fidelity toward the Church. In this way the ecumenical dialogue brings the Church to be seen more clearly as a sacrament of unity. Communion between Catholics and other Christians, however incomplete it may be, also calls all people to collaboration in various fields and thus makes possible common testimony of the salvific love of God toward the world which needs salvation.

8. Suggestions

a) Happily, since the new code of canon law was promulgated for the Latin Church, it is also to be hoped that a codification of Oriental law will rapidly be completed.

b) Because episcopal conferences are so useful, even necessary in the daily pastoral work of the Church, it is desired that a theological study of their status be made, and most of all the question of their doctrinal teaching authority more clearly and profoundly explained, always remebering that which the Council in the decree "Christus Dominus" 38 and in the Code of Canon Law Canons 447 and 753 expound.

c) It is recommended that a study be made to consider whether the principle of subsidiarity existing in human society can be applied in the Church and by which mode and in which sense this application can be made (cf. Pius XII, AAS 38, 1946, page 144).

D. The Mission of the Church in the World

1. The Importance Of the Constitution 'Gaudium et Spes'

The Church as a communion is a sacrament for the salvation of the world. Powers therefore in the Church are set down by Christ for the salvation of the world. In this context we affirm the great importance and the great timeliness of the pastoral constitution "Gaudium et Spes." At the same time we understand the signs of our times are partially diverse from those of the time of the Council, trials and difficulties having been felt. Hunger in the world grows every day everywhere, oppression, injustice and war, torments and terrorism and other forms of violence of whatever kind. This obliges us to make a new and a more profound theological reflection, by which the signs of the times are to be interpreted under the light of the Gospel.

2. Theology of the Cross

It seems to us in daily difficulties that God wants us to teach the more profound value, importance and centrality of the cross of Jesus Christ. Thus, the relationship between human history and the history of salvation under the light of the pascal mystery needs to be explained. Certainly the theology of the cross does not exclude at all the theology of creation and of incarnation, but as is apparent, it also presupposes it. When we as Christians speak of the cross, we do not apply a strictly pessimistic title, but we are constituted in the realism of a Christian faith.

3. 'Aggiornamento'

In this paschal perspective which affirmed the unity of the cross and Resurrection, it is necessary to distinguish the true and false sense of the so-called aggiornamento. A merely facile accommodation to the secularization of the Church is to be excluded. Also to be excluded is an immovable closure of the community of the faith upon itself. What is to be affirmed, however, is a missionary openness for the complete salvation of the world. Through that, all values truly human not only are accepted but are more carefully guarded: the dignity of the human person, the fundamental rights of man, peace, liberty from oppression, from misery and injustice. Truly an integral salvation is only to be obtained if these human realities are purified and are further elevated through grace to familiarity with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

4. Inculturation

We now treat here this theological principle regarding the problem of inculturation. Since the church is a communion which is made up of unity and diversity, present in the whole world, it takes itself up in all cultures. Inculturation is separate from a mere adaptation, because it signifies an intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through an integration in Christianity and an implementation of Christianity in various human cultures.

The gap between the Gospel and culture is called by Paul VI "the drama of our time, just as it was of other times."

"Therefore, every effort must be made to insure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed." (EN 20)

5. Dialogue With Non-Christian Religions And With Unbelievers

The Second Vatican Council affirmed that the Catholic Church denies nothing which is true and which is holy in other non-Christian religions. Even more so Catholics are exhorted, that with prudence and charity through dialogue and collaboration with people of other religions, witnessing to faith and Christian life, they preserve and promote those spiritual goods and moral goods and also those socio-cultural values, which are recognized in other faiths. (cf. NAE 2). The Council also affirms that God does not deny the possibility of salvation to all men of good will. (cf. Lumen Gentium 16). The concrete possibilities of dialogue in various regions depend on various concrete circumstances, which can lead into a dialogue with non-Christians.

A dialogue is not opposed to mission. Authentic dialogue leads human persons to be open and share his intimacy with the other. Furthermore, all Christians receive from Christ a mission so that all peoples will be made disciples of the same Christ. (cf. Matthew 28:18). In this regard God is able to use dialogue among Christians and non-Christians and non-believers as a way of communicating more plentiful graces.

6. The Preferential Option For the Poor And Human Development

After the Second Vatican Council the Church has been made more aware of its mission in service of the poor, of the oppressed and of the alienated. In this preferential option, which is not to be understood as exclusive, the true light of the Gospel shines forth. Jesus Christ declared: Blessed are the poor (cf. Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20) and He Himself wished to be poor for our sake.

Aside from the material poverty of goods, there is an absence of liberty and of spiritual goods which can be called a form of poverty. This is specially grave when religious liberty is suppressed by force.

The Church must in a prophetic way denounce all forms of poverty and oppression and defend and encourage the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person everywhere. For this reason it is highly desirable to speak of human life, which from its very beginning needs to be promoted and defended and protected in all circumstances and in all respects against aggressors.

The Synod expresses its communion with its brothers and sisters who on account of their faith suffer persecution and also suffer for the promotion of justice. The Church pours out its heart in prayer for them to God.

We must understand the salvific mission of the church as related to the world integrally. Although the mission of the church is spiritual it also implies a promotion of human values in the field of the temporal. In this regard, the mission of the church is not to be reduced to monism in whatever way that is to be understood. In that mission, the relationship between the natural and grace is distinct, but not at all separate. This duality is not a dualism. False and useless oppositions, for example, between the spiritual mission and a solicitude for the world are to be avoided and to be overcome.

7. Suggestions

Since the world is continually evolving, the signs of the times must again and again be submitted to analysis so that the announcing of the Gospel will be heard more clearly and the activities of the Church be made more intensive for the salvation of the world and be led into daily life. In this context, what needs to be done in practice needs to be examined again:

(a) the theology of the cross and the paschal mystery in preaching, in sacraments and in the life of the Church in our time,

(b) the theology and practice of inculturation and dialogue with non-Christian religions and with non-believers,

(c) what constitutes the preferential option for the poor,

(d) the social doctrine of the church related to human development in circumstances always new.

Finally, this synodal gathering from its heart gives thanks to God the Father through his Son in the Holy Spirit for the greatest graces of this century, namely, for the Second Vatican Council. But it also gives thanks for the spiritual experience of this celebration of the 20th anniversary, which fills our hearts with joy and hope amid the sufferings and trials of this world. Just as with the Apostles in the upper room with Mary, the Holy Spirit teaches us those things which He wishes to speak to the Church its pilgrim way toward the third millennium.

We, all the bishops, together with and under Peter, commit ourselves to a more profound understanding of the Second Vatican Council and of introducing it into the practice of the Church, just as it was our intention in this Synodal gathering. We have celebrated the Council and we certify and seek to promote it. The announcement of the Second Vatican Council was taken up by the whole church with a consensus of spirit, it is the Magna Carta and will remain so for future time.

Therefore, let there come in our time that "new pentecost" of which Pope John XXIII spoke and which we, with all the Christian faithful, await from the Holy Spirit. May the Spirit bring it about, with Mary, the Mother of the Church interceding, that as this century passes on, "the church may celebrate the mysteries of Christ, under the Word of God, for the salvation of the world."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.